DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 244 CE 079 995

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TITLE Just-in-Time Employees: UPS and the Knowledge Supply Chain. Tomorrow's Workplace Today: Profiles of Excellence in Business Leadership, Volume 1, Number 1.
INSTITUTION National Alliance of Business, Inc., Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-01-00
NOTE 13p.; Based on a speech given at the Annual Meeting of the National Alliance of Business (30th, Washington, DC, October 1998).
AVAILABLE FROM National Alliance of Business, 1201 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Tel: 800-787-1212 (Toll Free); Fax: 202-289-2869; e-mail: info@nab.com; Web site: http://www.nab.com.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Education Work Relationship; Job Skills; Job Training; *Labor Force Development; *Labor Needs; *Labor Supply; *Partnerships in Education; Postsecondary Education; Program Development; Program Implementation; Public Agencies; School Business Relationship; Secondary Education; *Welfare Recipients
IDENTIFIERS United Parcel Service

ABSTRACT

All businesses are grappling with knowledge networks--finding the right employees at the right time with the right knowledge and skills. The National Alliance of Business, MIT, and others have been working on an intriguing way to look at labor supply and demand issues called knowledge supply chain management. UPS (United Parcel Service) manages the knowledge supply chain through front-line and management training efforts and programs and tools like school-to-work, welfare-to-work, and community involvement. Each member of the knowledge supply chain--employers, colleges, trade schools, secondary schools, trainers, community groups, and government agencies--plays a role in the process of developing qualified workers, on both the demand and supply side of the equation. Under this framework, the labor market changes from one where educators push people out into the work world, regardless of their skills, to one where employers reach into the system to pull out people with the skills that better prepare them for personal and economic success. An UPS school-to-work program that deals with the front end of the supply chain has enrolled over 1,000 high school students. UPS has established welfare-to-work programs in conjunction with local governments in 40 locations across the country and helped more than 10,400 people from welfare to the workplace since January 1997. Two areas of training and development are especially critical to UPS: (1) technology training of front-line workers; and (2) development of managers and supervisors. (YLB)

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Profiles of Excellence in Business Leadership

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John Alden
Vice Chairman, United Parcel Service

"UPS and the Knowledge Supply Chain"

Volume 1
Number 1
January
1999

CE 079 995
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NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BUSINESS

"Tomorrow's Workplace Today" is a series which profiles excellence in business leadership. The creative ideas and best thinking of today's top corporate leaders are showcased in these publications, produced by the National Alliance of Business. This inaugural issue, "Just-in-Time Employees: UPS and the Knowledge Supply Chain," is based on a speech given by John Alden, Vice Chairman, United Parcel Service, at the National Alliance of Business' 30th Annual Conference in October 1998 in Washington, DC.

This is the first in an ongoing series of profiles of innovative business leaders. When John Alden spoke at the National Alliance of Business' 30th Annual Conference, he was able to accomplish what many business leaders have not yet been able to do — to synthesize the many challenges facing today's employers and to point out how to meet those challenges with strategic, integrated thinking and planning.

The Knowledge Supply Chain describes this type of thinking and recognizes that employers and employees do not operate in isolation. Business will not be able to find employees with the proper skills if our nation's education system is not the strongest it can be. Not only do we need higher standards, challenging assessments, and accountability in our school system, but we also need open discussions about what skills and knowledge America's future workers will need to be successful in the global economy. Gaining new knowledge does not stop with graduation from high school or college. Today's employees are learning through a lifetime.

American business continues to face the requirements of high skills and global competition. No one can afford to be left behind. Employees will continue to come from many different backgrounds and skill levels, and all need to become innovative, productive partners as we move into the future.

I hope you find this publication informative and thought-provoking.

Roberts T. Jones
President and CEO
National Alliance of Business

The National Alliance of Business, a non-profit organization, advances business leadership at the national, state, and local levels to improve workforce quality through enhanced education and training. The key to success for American business is a quality workforce — a workforce for which all citizens are educated and trained to world-class standards, beginning in school and continuing throughout their careers.

Just-in-time Employees:

UPS and the Knowledge Supply Chain

The one issue all businesses seem to be grappling with is knowledge networks — finding the right employees at the right time with the right knowledge and skills. Let me assure you, it's not an easy task. And it's not something only present day employers have had to wrestle with.

John Alden
Vice Chairman
United Parcel Service

UPS has been managing the knowledge supply chain for 91 years. Of course, we haven't always referred to it in those terms. But that's exactly what we were doing: taking good solid people and building a vertically and horizontally strong organization. We were by no means alone in this regard.

Thomas Edison dealt with the challenge head on. Not surprisingly, he had a unique way of finding the right engineers. Edison would give the applicant a light bulb and ask, "How much water will it hold?" There were two ways to find the answer. The first choice was to use gauges to measure all the angles of the bulb. Then, with the measurements in hand, the engineer would calculate the surface area. This approach could take as long as twenty minutes. The second choice was to fill the bulb with water and then pour the contents into a measuring cup. Total elapsed time: about a minute. Engineers who took the first route, and performed their measurements by book, were thanked politely for their time and sent on their way. If you took the second route, you heard Edison say, "You're hired."

Unfortunately, the task of finding employees who not only have knowledge but know how to apply that knowledge has gotten even harder recently, thanks to a major sign of the times. It's a sign of the times you've been seeing a lot lately — help wanted.

Since 1992, labor demand has grown by 10.6 percent, while the total labor supply has grown just 7.3 percent.

America's Workforce Challenge

At UPS, the nation's third-largest employer, I can tell you that we're challenged to find qualified workers. This should come as no surprise, really. Since 1992, labor demand has grown by 10.6 percent, while the total labor supply has grown just 7.3 percent.

You don't have to be a macro economist to figure out what happens when demand exceeds supply. But frankly, the main problem is not a lack of warm bodies. It's a lack of skilled workers. In the past five years alone, the percentage of companies reporting that skill shortages are a barrier to growth has more than doubled — to nearly seven out of ten companies. Six out of ten manufacturing firms report rejecting more than half the applicants for positions as unqualified.

Edward Gubman, of Hewitt Associates, points out in his new book, "The Talent Solution," that a lack of qualified workers has prompted states like Michigan and Ohio to launch national advertising campaigns to attract skilled workers. I can tell you that similar concerns are being echoed in UPS's home state of Georgia, even

though it has largely outperformed the rest of the nation in attracting skilled workers in recent years. Gubman also points out that in the U.S. today, nearly 200,000 information technology jobs remain open at companies large and small with little hope of finding qualified people to fill them.

The dearth of skilled professionals isn't limited to the United States, of course. In Southeast Asia, business leaders estimate that the region needs at least 3 million more managers — double the current number — just to catch up and compete with other developed markets.

A tight labor market has big implications for training as well. In short, we'll probably end up having to do more of it. Small and mid-size businesses report that they're spending 2.6 percent of total revenue on training alone. Granted, tight labor markets come and go, but no matter how well the economy is performing, the basic challenge of matching employer needs with labor skills remains.

Responding to Skills Demands and Skills Shortages

The National Alliance of Business, MIT and others have been working on an intriguing way to look at labor supply and demand issues. They call it knowledge supply chain management. That's what I'd like to talk with you about — how UPS finds and keeps qualified employees by managing the knowledge supply chain.

I'm particularly interested in this subject because part of my responsibilities include making sure our people are aligned with the needs of our customers and the priorities and vision of the company. At UPS and many other companies, managing the knowledge supply chain has simply become an essential alignment tool.

Most people know UPS as a company whose business is managing the physical supply chain. Today, I want to tell you that managing the knowledge supply chain is every bit as important. I'll show you how we're doing it through front-line and management training efforts and through programs and tools like school-to-work, welfare-to-work and community involvement.

I should note up front that our business was built on knowledge workers. For most of our 91 years at UPS, we've been charged with molding and shaping a workforce that comes from a largely blue-collar, middle-class background and grooming them into what is today one of the best managed and most respected service organizations in the world.

Don't get me wrong. UPS has by no means mastered the concept of knowledge supply chains. We still have a long way to go, but we're confident we're on the right track. So, I offer these UPS examples as part of a work in progress. First, though, it might be helpful to review a few basic tenets of knowledge supply chains and how they are closely linked to physical supply chains.

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Manufacturers have done very well in recent years figuring out how to link suppliers, vendors and business partners in a continuous, integrated physical supply chain. By forging intimate electronic information links among suppliers and partners, manufacturers are able to speed up the product cycle, reduce inventory, cut costs and deliver finished products "just in time." Thanks to information technology, the goal is no longer vertical integration, it's virtual integration — electronically connected organizations acting and working as one.

At UPS, we have a whole Worldwide Logistics division designed to help our clients integrate their physical supply chains. We offer the ability to take over a big chunk of our client's supply chain, providing everything from pre-sales functions like inventory management, facility planning and warehousing to post-sale activities such as order processing, customs brokerage, package testing and fleet management.

These are the same principles underlying knowledge supply chains, except that instead of moving goods and information, you're developing people. You're getting "just-in-time" employees, so to speak.

Just who are the members of this supply chain? Employers, colleges, trade schools, secondary schools, trainers, community groups, government agencies and others.

Each member has a particular role to play in the process of developing qualified workers, on both the demand and the supply side of the equation. On the demand side, employers need to articulate to suppliers the kind of skills they need, and then provide continuing training and development once an employee comes on board. Meanwhile, knowledge suppliers — specifically educators and trainers — need to partner with employers to develop curricula that prepare students for today's information-driven workplace.

Under this framework, the whole labor market changes from one where educators push people out into the work world, regardless of their skills, to one where employers reach into the system to pull out people who have the skills that better prepare them for personal and economic success. As a result, labor supply and demand becomes better aligned, benefiting not only employers, but also employees.

There's a whole lot more to the concept of knowledge supply chains, much of which you'll be hearing about at this conference. But this brief overview will hopefully serve as a framework for helping you understand why we're doing what we do at UPS.

The Education Partnership

Many years before we ever heard the term "knowledge supply chain," UPS understood that our company would rise or fall based on the skills, knowledge and values of our employees. We also understood that the development of an employee's character was largely shaped before they ever entered the doors of UPS. Consequently, our approach for decades has been to partner with educators, churches, government agencies and non-profit organizations to guide the development of people early in their lives.

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A focus on developing the whole person is why we've been funding educational initiatives and scholarships for more than 50 years — why we've been participating broadly in mentoring programs, Junior Achievement, and other company-wide community volunteer efforts.

For all of us today, no matter what business we happen to be in, the character issue is very, very important. At UPS, our philosophy has always been, "Give us people of good character, and we can take raw talent and make people successful." You see that success played out on the streets and in the offices, warehouses and storefronts around the world, where more than 70,000 UPS drivers deliver more than 12 million packages to 7 million customers every day.

Perhaps one of the better examples of this is our chairman himself, Jim Kelly, and other members of his senior management team — all of whom began their UPS careers on the front-lines of the company.

When you consider that one out of eight 17-year-olds is functionally illiterate and that one million high school students drop out every year, you can understand why UPS is so concerned with the front end of the knowledge supply chain.

I talked earlier about the shortage of qualified workers. When you consider that one out of eight 17-year-olds is functionally illiterate and that one million high school students drop out every year, you can understand why UPS is so concerned with the front end of the knowledge supply chain. Frankly, if we want to stay in business, we can't afford not to be.

One of our most important programs that deals with the front end of the supply chain is school-to-work. In the past four years, UPS has established several school-to-work programs in places like Burtonsville, Maryland right here in suburban Washington. We're also creating opportunities in Louisville, Kentucky, Chicago and Philadelphia.

More than one thousand high school students have enrolled in these school-to-work programs, which we hope to eventually replicate across the country. Although each program differs a bit, they share some common elements. Students typically go to high school in the morning, work part-time in UPS package handling centers in the afternoon or evening, and take college accredited courses on-site at UPS. Along the way, students are mentored by educators, parents, professors and UPS managers.

By easing the transition between school and work, and by combining what students learn in the classroom with experience in the work world, these programs help at-risk youths earn money and gain skills while leaving open avenues for higher education.

And UPS benefits by getting access to a talented, motivated workforce that eventually forms a promotable pool of supervisor candidates. We benefit in other ways, too. We estimate that training costs are 25 to 50 percent lower for school-to-work employees, and that these young part-timers tend to be more reliable and stick around longer.

School-to-work programs cannot be carried out without symbiotic partnerships between employers, schools and state agencies. For example, in Louisville, Kentucky, where our major air hub and about 15,000 UPS employees are located, we've joined with 31 area high

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schools in ten counties to enroll more than 300 students this year. It's part of our ten-year commitment to the state of Kentucky to help implement the Kentucky Education Reform Act, which enlists businesses and schools in an all-out effort to prepare students for careers in the 21st Century.

In the age of knowledge workers and information technology, however, there is no reason that business-and-education partnerships have to end at high school graduation. In Louisville, we've joined with three area colleges to open the doors of Metropolitan College, an innovative approach to higher education that some refer to as "UPS University." Students can earn degrees at night from the University of Louisville, Jefferson College or Kentucky Tech while working part-time at UPS during the day. They can choose from among 19 different majors while receiving 50 percent tuition reimbursement from UPS. And to ensure that Metropolitan College graduates bring needed technology skills to the workplace, UPS has also committed $1.5 million to Metropolitan College affiliates for smart classroom technology upgrades.

We estimate that training costs are 25 to 50 percent lower for school-to-work employees, and that these young part-timers tend to be more reliable and stick around longer.

In the lexicon of the knowledge supply chain, what we're essentially doing is working closely with the suppliers — the schools and the educators — to turn out a better "product." In the process, we're helping change lives and expand our labor pool in markets where jobs have gone begging. Our challenge now is to expand these pockets of success nationwide. Based on our experiences thus far, we fully intend to do that.

Welfare-to-Work Works

Another way we're helping feed the knowledge supply chain is through welfare-to-work initiatives. UPS has established welfare-to-work programs in conjunction with local governments in 40 locations across the country. I'm told the UPS effort represents the nation's largest private welfare-to-work initiative.

As one of the inaugural members of the national Welfare to Work Partnership, UPS has helped move more than 10,400 people from welfare to the workplace since January 1997 alone. Participants typically start out in full or part-time package sorter positions. They receive the same above-average hourly compensation and generous benefits packages that other UPS workers get. We even work with government agencies, civic groups and churches to help workers overcome obstacles, like transportation and daycare, which slow their transition to the workplace.

By the way, these are not make-work jobs — they are jobs that require hard work, and they're jobs with a future. Company statistics show that we've managed to retain about 70 percent of the former welfare recipients we've hired. Like school-to-work, welfare-to-work isn't mainly about good deeds and company philanthropy — it's about expanding our pool of qualified workers. But we have to admit that we feel pretty good about the benefits to struggling individuals, to taxpayers and to society.

I must also tell you, however, that welfare-to-work is not without its own challenges. Challenges of education and expectations. Finding a job, while gratifying, can also be frustrating if a person cannot move ahead because of lack of a basic education. It's frustrating for the employer and, of course, for the employee. That's why welfare-to-work cannot stop at the hiring process. Both employee and employer must be committed to long-term training and development. I'm afraid that without that commitment, the proposition just doesn't work.

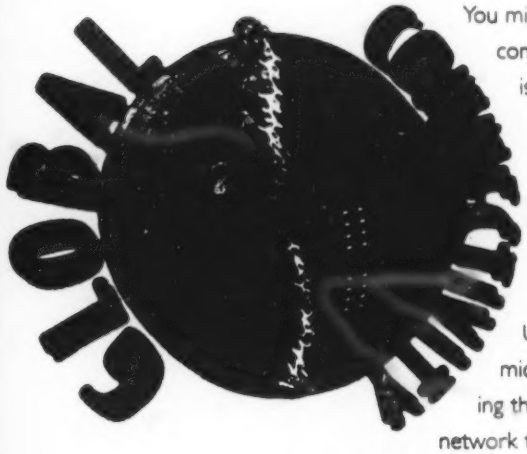
Like school-to-work, welfare-to-work isn't mainly about good deeds and company philanthropy — it's about expanding our pool of qualified workers.

Training as a Business Imperative

I've talked about some UPS efforts at the front end of the supply chain. But what about the other end of the supply chain – the training and development of *all* employees once they're on board? Training and development are especially important in a company where promotion-from-within is the guiding standard. Tens of thousands of UPS managers have worked their way up through UPS. We're a company of long-timers: the average full-time UPS employee has been with the company more than 15 years and has worked in 6 different positions.

Promotion-from-within absolutely demands comprehensive training and development programs, and UPS has them. In fact, if I were to describe all our training and development initiatives, I would probably go hoarse. That's because we spend more than $300 million dollars a year on nearly 200 company-wide training and education programs.

Let me just briefly highlight two areas of training that are especially critical to UPS in an era when information and knowledge are the building blocks for competitive advantage — technology training of front-line workers, and development of managers and supervisors.



You might be wondering why technology training is necessary for a company ostensibly driven by hard labor and hustle. The truth is, this isn't your father's UPS anymore. We're a company increasingly defined by information technology, because information about a package has become as important as the package itself. Consequently, we're spending more on information technology this year — about one billion dollars — than we're spending on trucks.

UPS is highly computerized, with 14 mainframes, 390 mid-ranges and 165,000 PCs. We're highly networked, operating the world's largest cellular network and a telecommunications network that spans 70 countries and more than half a million users. And we're online, processing over 200,000 tracking requests over the Internet every day.

The company's digital revolution extends all the way to the palms of our drivers and wrists of our sorters. You have probably seen the notebook-sized computers that our drivers carry around, which they use to record deliveries and obtain signatures. Part powerful computer, part cellular phone, these so-called "DIADs" are the closest thing our employees have to holding the company in the palm of their hands. And we've got nearly 80,000 of those computers in the hands of our drivers every day.

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The people who sort packages in our high-speed, high-volume hubs also rely on interactions with computers to do their jobs. Attached to their wrists are computerized scanners that record the status of packages in transit. Operating these powerful, high-tech devices requires careful training.

As part of their two-week orientation, our drivers receive hands-on training in using the DIADs and must pass final exams that require mastering of the technology. Sorters also have to train extensively and are tested on the use of their wrist scanners during the course of their initial training.

After initial training, we continue to measure the progress of our front-line workers through what we call "knowledge units." Knowledge units measure the mastery of skills for particular jobs. For example, sorters earn knowledge units by memorizing the sorting categories of hundreds of zip codes.

The point is, you don't just find knowledge workers in computer-chip companies. As information technology penetrates even into traditional, labor-intensive companies like UPS, training needs will continue to escalate, as will the need for a workforce prepared to use its brains along with its hands.

As information technology penetrates even into traditional, labor-intensive companies like UPS, training needs will continue to escalate, as will the need for a workforce prepared to use its brains along with its hands.

The people who supervise this skilled workforce also receive extensive training. At UPS, our supervisors, managers and executives are all required to go through a mandatory slate of ongoing management training programs addressing issues ranging from diversity, technology, teamwork and ethics.

Training encompasses the whole person. To enhance their ability to manage a diverse workforce and understand cultural differences, many senior managers also take part in a four-week Community Internship Program. Senior managers are dispatched to one of four locations run by non-profit agencies in Chicago, New York, Chattanooga, and Mission, Texas. Typical activities include serving meals to the homeless, aiding migrant farm workers in building temporary housing and schools and helping teachers manage a classroom of children in a Head Start program.

The Community Internship Program is just one of many UPS volunteer programs designed to involve UPS people in their local communities. For instance, more than 30,000 UPS employees participate in our Neighbor-to-Neighbor program, which provides a bank of volunteers in each UPS district.

Community involvement, when you think about it, completes the knowledge supply chain. The chain starts with educating and equipping people with the skills and knowledge and values they need to participate in the work world. It continues with on-the-job training and development. And, when corporate volunteers freely lend their talents and energies to help others, the chain extends back into the very communities from which human capital is drawn.

The Next Steps

Cynics would scoff at the notion that knowledge supply chains serve any higher purpose. They would say that knowledge supply chains are nothing more than a selfish attempt by corporations to find the employees they need and to treat people like widgets moving through an impersonal factory line. This morning, I'd like to close with a plea to everyone in this room to prove the cynics wrong.

We need intermediaries like the National Alliance of Business and the National Urban League to be our ambassadors to school districts, to colleges, to government agencies and volunteer groups. We need your help in demonstrating that cooperation between employers and knowledge suppliers benefits not only employers, but each and every member of the supply chain. I've already given you several examples that demonstrate these benefits. Cynics will have a hard time criticizing cooperative efforts that so clearly benefit all parties.

And cynics will also have a hard time looking into the faces of people like Viola Mason, who is a living testament to the power of the knowledge supply chain. Thirty-nine-year-old Viola, a mother of four, had been on welfare for eight years when she returned to finish her high school diploma under Chicago Public Schools' Second Chance program.

Last year, she also enrolled in a UPS school-to-work program. One of our UPS managers tells us that "Viola was riding the bus with the kids, getting them to do their homework on the bus and mentoring them on her own." UPS decided to promote her to part-time supervisor and pay her for what she was doing.

Viola's goal is to graduate before her youngest daughter becomes a freshman at the same school, but most of the time she's concentrating her efforts on the other school-to-work students. Here's what Viola told the *Chicago Tribune*, "Some of these children have been influenced not to work because some of their parents never worked. Many of these kids are proud to be the first person in their families to have a job."

Seventeen-year-old King Chester is one of those kids. He is an honor student who unloads trailers at UPS. King reports that some of his friends quit the program because they thought the work was too hard. But most of them stay, and experience the value of hard work. Here's what King says about his job, "There are a lot of conveyor belts and a lot of noise. But once you get used to it, it sounds like organized noise."

In this tight labor market, where help wanted signs are the norm, we must work together to develop new sources of workforce talent and we must start early in the process. If we succeed, what young King Chester calls "organized noise" — the busy hum of workers using their skills to create competitive advantages for their employers — will echo across the country. And that will sound like music to the ears of American business.

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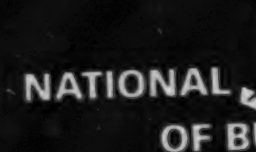

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